

## VIII

### THE PLAIN NECESSITY FOR A LEAGUE

Great as the sacrifices of prejudice and preconception which any effective realization of this idea of a League of Free Nations will demand, difficult as the necessary delegations of sovereignty must be, none the less are such sacrifices and difficulties unavoidable. People in France and Italy and Great Britain and Germany alike have to subdue their minds to the realization that some such League is now a necessity for them if their peace and national life are to continue. There is no prospect before them but either some such League or else great humiliation and disastrous warfare driving them down towards social dissolution; and for the United States it is only a question of a little longer time before the same alternatives have to be faced.

Whether this war ends in the complete defeat of Germany and German imperialism, or in a revolutionary modernization of Germany, or in a practical triumph for the Hohenzollerns, are considerations that affect the nature and scope of the League, but do not affect its essential necessity. In the first two cases the League of Free Nations will be a world league including Germany as a principal partner, in the latter case the League of Free Nations will be a defensive league standing steadfast against the threat of a world imperialism, and watching and restraining with one common will the homicidal maniac in its midst. But in all these cases there can be no great alleviation of the evils that

now blacken and threaten to ruin human life altogether, unless all the civilized and peace-seeking peoples of the world are pledged and locked together under a common law and a common world policy. There must rather be an intensification of these evils. There must be wars more evil than this war continuing this war, and more destructive of civilized life. There can be no peace and hope for our race but an organized peace and hope, armed against disturbance as a state is armed against mad, ferocious, and criminal men.

Now, there are two chief arguments, running one into the other, for the necessity of merging our existing sovereignties into a greater and, if possible, a world-wide league. The first is the present geographical impossibility of nearly all the existing European states and empires; and the second is the steadily increasing disproportion between the tortures and destructions inflicted by modern warfare and any possible advantages that may arise from it. Underlying both arguments is the fact that modern developments of mechanical science have brought the nations of Europe together into too close a proximity. This present war, more than anything else, is a violent struggle between old political ideas and new antagonistic conditions.

It is the unhappy usage of our schools and universities to study the history of mankind only during periods of mechanical unprogressiveness. The historical ideas of Europe range between the time when the Greeks were going about the world on foot or horseback or in galleys or sailing ships to the days when Napoleon, Wellington, and Nelson were going about at very much the same pace in much the same vehicles and vessels. At the

advent of steam and electricity the muse of history holds her nose and shuts her eyes. Science will study and get the better of a modern disease, as, for example, sleeping sickness, in spite of the fact that it has no classical standing; but our history schools would be shocked at the bare idea of studying the effect of modern means of communication upon administrative areas, large or small. This defect in our historical training has made our minds politically sluggish. We fail to adapt readily enough. In small things and great alike we are trying to run the world in areas marked out in or before the eighteenth century, regardless of the fact that a man or an army or an aeroplane can get in a few minutes or a few hours to points that it would have taken days or weeks to reach under the old foot-and-horse conditions. That matters nothing to the learned men who instruct our statesmen and politicians. It matters everything from the point of view of social and economic and political life. And the grave fact to consider is that all the great states of Europe, except for the unification of Italy and Germany, are still much of the size and in much the same boundaries that made them strong and safe in the eighteenth century, that is to say, in the closing years of the foot-horse period. The British empire grew and was organized under those conditions, and had to modify itself only a little to meet the needs of steam shipping. All over the world are its linked possessions and its ports and coaling stations and fastnesses on the trade routes. And British people still look at the red-splashed map of the world with the profoundest self-satisfaction, blind to the swift changes that are making that scattered empire--if it is to remain an isolated system--almost the most dangerous conceivable.

Let me ask the British reader who is disposed to sneer at the League of Nations and say he is very well content with the empire, thank you, to get his atlas and consider one or two propositions. And, first, let him think of aviation. I can assure him, because upon this matter I have some special knowledge, that long-distance air travel for men, for letters and light goods and for bombs, is continually becoming more practicable. But the air routes that air transport will follow must go over a certain amount of land, for this reason that every few hundred miles at the longest the machine must come down for petrol. A flying machine with a safe non-stop range of 1500 miles is still a long way off. It may indeed be permanently impracticable because there seems to be an upward limit to the size of an aeroplane engine. And now will the reader take the map of the world and study the air routes from London to the rest of the empire? He will find them perplexing--if he wants them to be "All-Red." Happily this is not a British difficulty only. Will he next study the air routes from Paris to the rest of the French possessions? And, finally, will he study the air routes out of Germany to anywhere? The Germans are as badly off as any people. But we are all badly off. So far as world air transit goes any country can, if it chooses, choke any adjacent country. Directly any trade difficulty breaks out, any country can begin a vexatious campaign against its neighbour's air traffic. It can oblige it to alight at the frontier, to follow prescribed routes, to land at specified places on those routes and undergo examinations that will waste precious hours. But so far as I can see, no European statesman, German or Allied, have begun to give their attention to this amazing difficulty. Without a great pooling of air control, either a world-wide pooling or a pooling at least of the

Atlantic-Mediterranean Allies in one Air League, the splendid peace possibilities of air transport--and they are indeed splendid--must remain very largely a forbidden possibility to mankind.

And as a second illustration of the way in which changing conditions are altering political questions, let the reader take his atlas and consider the case of that impregnable fastness, that great naval station, that Key to the Mediterranean, Gibraltar. British boys are brought up on Gibraltar and the Gibraltar idea. To the British imagination Gibraltar is almost as sacred a national symbol as the lions in Trafalgar Square. Now, in his atlas the reader will almost certainly find an inset map of this valuable possession, coloured bright red. The inset map will have attached to it a small scale of miles. From that he will be able to satisfy himself that there is not an inch of the rock anywhere that is not within five miles or less of Spanish land, and that there is rather more than a semicircle of hills round the rock within a range of seven or eight miles. That is much less than the range of a sixteen-inch gun. In other words, the Spaniards are in a position to knock Gibraltar to bits whenever they want to do so, or to smash and sink any ships in its harbour. They can hit it on every side. Consider, moreover, that there are long sweeps of coast north, south, and west of the Rock, from which torpedoes could be discharged at any ship that approached. Inquire further where on the Rock an aeroplane can land. And having ascertained these things, ask yourself what is the present value of Gibraltar?

I will not multiply disagreeable instances of this sort, though it would be easy enough to do so in the case both of France and Italy as well as

of Great Britain. I give them as illustrations of the way in which everywhere old securities and old arrangements must be upset by the greater range of modern things. Let us get on to more general conditions. There is not a capital city in Europe that twenty years from now will not be liable to a bombing raid done by hundreds or even thousands of big aeroplanes, upon or even before a declaration of war, and there is not a line of sea communication that will not be as promptly interrupted by the hostile submarine. I point these things out here only to carry home the fact that the ideas of sovereign isolation and detachment that were perfectly valid in 1900, the self-sufficient empire, Imperial Zollverein and all that stuff, and damn the foreigner! are now, because of the enormous changes in range of action and facility of locomotion that have been going on, almost as wild--or would be if we were not so fatally accustomed to them--and quite as dangerous, as the idea of setting up a free and sovereign state in the Isle of Dogs. All the European empires are becoming vulnerable at every point. Surely the moral is obvious. The only wise course before the allied European powers now is to put their national conceit in their pockets and to combine to lock up their foreign policy, their trade interests, and all their imperial and international interests into a League so big as to be able to withstand the most sudden and treacherous of blows. And surely the only completely safe course for them and mankind--hard and nearly impossible though it may seem at the present juncture--is for them to lock up into one unity with a democratized Germany and with all the other states of the earth into one peace-maintaining League.

If the reader will revert again to his atlas he will see very clearly

that a strongly consolidated League of Free Nations, even if it consisted only of our present allies, would in itself form a combination with so close a system of communication about the world, and so great an economic advantage, that in the long run it could oblige Germany and the rest of the world to come in to its council. Divided the Oceanic Allies are, to speak plainly, geographical rags and nakedness; united they are a world. To set about organizing that League now, with its necessary repudiation on the part of Britain, France, and Italy, of a selfish and, it must be remembered in the light of these things I have but hinted at here, a now hopelessly unpracticable imperialism, would, I am convinced, lead quite rapidly to a great change of heart in Germany and to a satisfactory peace. But even if I am wrong in that, then all the stronger is the reason for binding, locking and uniting the allied powers together. It is the most dangerous of delusions for each and all of them to suppose that either Britain, France or Italy can ever stand alone again and be secure.

And turning now to the other aspect of these consequences of the development of material science, it is too often assumed that this war is being as horrible and destructive as war can be. There never was so great a delusion. This war has only begun to be horrible. No doubt it is much more horrible and destructive than any former war, but even in comparison with the full possibilities of known and existing means of destruction it is still a mild war. Perhaps it will never rise to its full possibilities. At the present stage there is not a combatant, except perhaps America, which is not now practising a pinching economy of steel and other mechanical material. The Germans are running short of

first-class flying men, and if we and our allies continue to press the air attack, and seek out and train our own vastly greater resources of first quality young airmen, the Germans may come as near to being "driven out of the air" as is possible. I am a firmer believer than ever I was in the possibility of a complete victory over Germany--through and by the air. But the occasional dropping of a big bomb or so in London is not to be taken as anything but a minimum display of what air war can do. In a little while now our alliance should be in a position to commence day and night continuous attacks upon the Rhine towns. Not hour-long raids such as London knows, but week-long raids. Then and then only shall we be able to gauge the really horrible possibilities of the air war. They are in our hands and not in the hands of the Germans. In addition the Germans are at a huge disadvantage in their submarine campaign. Their submarine campaign is only the feeble shadow of what a submarine campaign might be. Turning again to the atlas the reader can see for himself that the German and Austrian submarines are obliged to come out across very narrow fronts. A fence of mines less than three hundred miles long and two hundred feet deep would, for example, completely bar their exit through the North Sea. The U-boats run the gauntlet of that long narrow sea and pay a heavy toll to it. If only our Admiralty would tell the German public what that toll is now, there would come a time when German seamen would no longer consent to go down in them. Consider, however, what a submarine campaign would be for Great Britain if instead of struggling through this bottle-neck it were conducted from the coast of Norway, where these pests might harbour in a hundred fiords. Consider too what this weapon may be in twenty years' time in the hands of a country in the position of the United States.

Great Britain, if she is not altogether mad, will cease to be an island as soon as possible after the war, by piercing the Channel Tunnel--how different our transport problem would be if we had that now!--but such countries as Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, directly they are involved in the future in a war against any efficient naval power with an unimpeded sea access, will be isolated forthwith. I cannot conceive that any of the great ocean powers will rest content until such a tremendous possibility of blockade as the submarine has created is securely vested in the hands of a common league beyond any power of sudden abuse.

It must always be remembered that this war is a mechanical war conducted by men whose discipline renders them uninventive, who know little or nothing of mechanism, who are for the most part struggling blindly to get things back to the conditions for which they were trained, to Napoleonic conditions, with infantry and cavalry and comparatively light guns, the so-called "war of manoeuvres." It is like a man engaged in a desperate duel who keeps on trying to make it a game of cricket. Most of these soldiers detest every sort of mechanical device; the tanks, for example, which, used with imagination, might have given the British and French overwhelming victory on the western front, were subordinated to the usual cavalry "break through" idea. I am not making any particular complaint against the British and French generals in saying this. It is what must happen to any country which entrusts its welfare to soldiers. A soldier has to be a severely disciplined man, and a severely disciplined man cannot be a versatile man, and on the whole the British army has been as receptive to novelties as any. The German generals have

done no better; indeed, they have not done so well as the generals of the Allies in this respect. But after the war, if the world does not organize rapidly for peace, then as resources accumulate a little, the mechanical genius will get to work on the possibilities of these ideas that have merely been sketched out in this war. We shall get big land ironclads which will smash towns. We shall get air offensives--let the experienced London reader think of an air raid going on hour after hour, day after day--that will really burn out and wreck towns, that will drive people mad by the thousand. We shall get a very complete cessation of sea transit. Even land transit may be enormously hampered by aerial attack. I doubt if any sort of social order will really be able to stand the strain of a fully worked out modern war. We have still, of course, to feel the full shock effects even of this war. Most of the combatants are going on, as sometimes men who have incurred grave wounds will still go on for a time--without feeling them. The educational, biological, social, economic punishment that has already been taken by each of the European countries is, I feel, very much greater than we yet realize. Russia, the heaviest and worst-trained combatant, has indeed shown the effects and is down and sick, but in three years' time all Europe will know far better than it does now the full price of this war. And the shock effects of the next war will have much the same relation to the shock effects of this, as the shock of breaking a finger-nail has to the shock of crushing in a body. In Russia to-day we have seen, not indeed social revolution, not the replacement of one social order by another, but disintegration. Let not national conceit blind us. Germany, France, Italy, Britain are all slipping about on that same slope down which Russia has slid. Which goes first, it is hard to guess, or whether we

shall all hold out to some kind of Peace. At present the social discipline of France and Britain seems to be at least as good as that of Germany, and the morale of the Rhineland and Bavaria has probably to undergo very severe testing by systematized and steadily increasing air punishment as this year goes on. The next war--if a next war comes--will see all Germany, from end to end, vulnerable to aircraft....

Such are the two sets of considerations that will, I think, ultimately prevail over every prejudice and every difficulty in the way of the League of Free Nations. Existing states have become impossible as absolutely independent sovereignties. The new conditions bring them so close together and give them such extravagant powers of mutual injury that they must either sink national pride and dynastic ambitions in subordination to the common welfare of mankind or else utterly shatter one another. It becomes more and more plainly a choice between the League of Free Nations and a famished race of men looting in search of non-existent food amidst the smouldering ruins of civilization. In the end I believe that the common sense of mankind will prefer a revision of its ideas of nationality and imperialism, to the latter alternative. It may take obstinate men a few more years yet of blood and horror to learn this lesson, but for my own part I cherish an obstinate belief in the potential reasonableness of mankind.